

Further Reading

BEYOND GEOGRAPHY

BRAZIL: War Against Children

BRIDGES OF RESPECT: Creating support for Gay and Lesbian Youth

CENTURIES OF CHILDHOOD

CHANGING CHILDHOOD

CHILDREN AND FEMINISM

CHILDREN IN SOCIETY: A Libertarian Critique

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS HANDBOOK

CITY LINES Poems by London School Students

CLASSROOMS OF RESISTANCE

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD: Hidden Roots of Cruelty in Childrearing

FREEBORN IN EDUCATION: A Do-It yourself guide to the liberation of learning

GIRLS ARE POWERFUL

GROWING UP OEAQ

IRIGOBERTA MENCHU An Indian Woman in Guatemala

MODEL CHILDHOOD

NIGHTVISIONS: Illuminating Class and War

NO MASTER HIGH OR LOW: Libertarian Education in Britain 1890-1990

ONE TEENAGER IN TEN

OUR LIVES Young People's Autobiographies

REAL LIVES: Eleven Teenagers Who Don't Go to School

RESISTANCE AND RENEWAL

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES: Children in America's Schools

SOMETHING TO TELL YOU

SUMMERHILL

TEENAGE LIBERATION HANDBOOK: How to Quit School and Get a

Real Life

TESTIMONIES

THE CHILDREN OF SOWETO

THE HORNY TEENAGER'S GUIDE TO SEX

THE HUMAN CYCLE

THE LITTLE PRINCE

THE NEXT GENERATION Lives of Third World Children

THE POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD

THE WHITE LION EXPERIENCE

THOU SHALT NOT BE AWARE: Society's Betrayal of the Child

TRUE TO LIFE: WRITINGS BY YOUNG WOMEN

WHEN A CHILD KILLS

YOUNG, GAY AND PROUD

For a more complete bibliography or contact list, write to Syndicat des Elèves at the address at the beginning of this pamphlet.

Frederick Turner . Viking
Monthly Review Press
American Friends Service
Committee

Philippe Ariès . Vintage
Martin Hoyle ed. Writers &
Readers

MacKey, Negler & Wallace
Lesbian and Feminist
Mothers' Political Action
Group

Freedom Press
Youth Liberation Press

Ilse English Centre

Chris Searle ed.

Alice Miller

Libertarian Education, ed.

Libertarian Education (UK)

Susan Hemmings ed. Sheba

Brenda Rabkin . Abingdon

R. Menchu . Verso

Christa Wolf

Vegebond Press

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Grace Llewellyn editor .

Lowry House

Celia Haig Brown . Pulp

Jonathon Kozal . Crown

Publishers

London Lesbian and Gay

Teenage Group

A.S. Neill

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Sarah Holmes ed. Alison

Mbulelo Mzembe

Longman

P. Bragg Inc.

Colin Turnbull . Peladin

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

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. New Society Publishers

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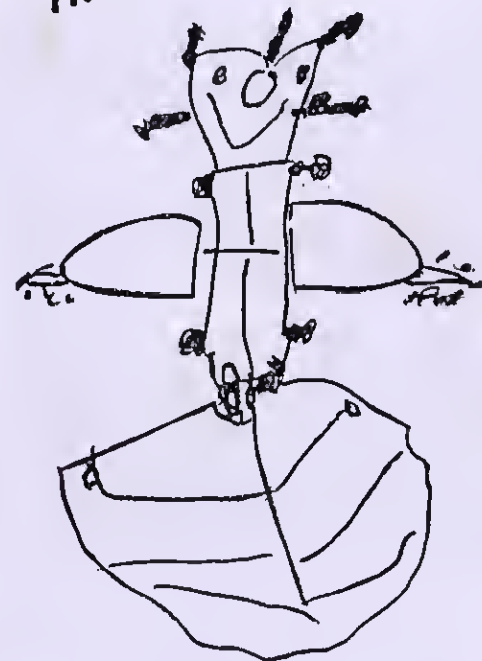
Paul Mones . POB 5701

Santa Monica . CA . 90405

USA

Alison Publishers

AS SOON AS YOU'RE BORN
THEY MAKE YOU FEEL SMALL



Self Determination for Children

What's Inside

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Cover drawing by Irene: the author in the bath

This pamphlet was originally written and produced in London, England in 1986. Some of the factual information is therefore out of date. It is part of an on-going preoccupation with children's oppression, starting from my own experience. I am interested in receiving writings by and about children and young people. As well, any feedback on the pamphlet is always welcome.

I would like to acknowledge the following who helped with the production: Margaret, Kate, Diane, Sarah, Rachel and Sue. Also, many thanks to Karl who has made this reprinting possible.

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IS IT ALWAYS LIKE THIS?

There are and have been places in the world where children are not hit or threatened, where children are welcomed as new members of the community, where they have a place, not separate from, but integral to that community and where differences of size, experience and ability are not grounds for being powerless or unimportant.

Such places are not to be found in western industrial society but exist in the ever shrinking margins of what is called civilisation. They are the homes of people who we call 'primitives' and their way of life is under threat. The people of the Amazonian rain forests are one such example. Those of you who saw the film 'The Emerald Rain Forest' will remember that these forests are being decimated in the interests of local elites and multinationals to make way for 'progress' like massive power dams.



The destruction of their home is being accompanied by enforced 'civilization' and all the benefits it brings: disease, alcoholism, poverty, foreign christian morality. Along with these comes acculturation to levels of violence hitherto unknown, let alone imagined, and the idea that wielding power-over-others is natural, human and inevitable. Such violence is internalised as well; self-repression and denial of the body are the other stigmas of civilisation, inseparable from the concepts of sin and guilt.

"When a child is 40 days old, there are more speeches, more promises on her/his behalf, and he becomes a full member of the community"

R. Menchú

a Guatemalan Indian Woman



In the 'secular' west we still behave very much in accordance with the christian idea that children are 'born in sin' and must be moulded and tamed into good citizens. If many of us no longer call it sin, it goes by other names like instinct which imply, that without adult discipline and instruction, children would be 'wild', selfish and anti-social. I began by referring to cultures where children are not perceived as 'demons' to be controlled, in order to raise some questions about children's status in this society.

"Violence is not an instinct. It isn't pressure that comes from within that has to be released. It is a cultural style."

J. Spiegel, Lomburg Centre for the Study of Violence.



MEDIA ADULTERATION

The media normally distorts children's activities and protests. Youth must be seen as helpless and impressionable; the common assumption is that they have been influenced, even brain-washed by adults. This was seen clearly in last year's students strike and is always suggested when children are involved in militant armed resistance.



Many Guatemalan Indian children who have witnessed the torture and death of family and community members, decide to join the guerrillas fighting the dictatorship. It is the experience of brutality and injustice which has brought about their commitment to combat the violence. Yet western journalists in this and countless other situations speculate about the psychological affects on children who take up arms. They seem to prefer that children suffer the trauma as passive victims rather than respond actively. Again it is the image of the active, self-motivated child which is threatening.

"My little sister had opted for the armed struggle; she was 8 when she joined the guerrillas."

R. Menchú

CHILDREN IN CHARGE

For adults who wish to work with children in order to question and change the conditions of children's lives, many contradictions arise. Individual adults cannot divest themselves of the social and economic power which adulthood confers on them. It cannot be wished away. It is essential for them to respect the need for children to organise independently, to make their own decisions.

Because of the legal and economic disadvantages which children suffer, adults can be useful in providing support and resources in these areas. Adults must not speak in the place of children. But conflicts are inevitable. Adults can also work at deconstructing and uncovering their own childhood experiences, as well as challenging the attitudes and behaviour of other adults. Breaking down the categories of child and adult is a useful strategy for change.

My Powered Chair

The first time that I got my powered chair home, I could not believe it. When I brought the powered chair up the road one of my friends said, 'This is the first time that I don't have to wheel your wheelchair up and down the road in ten years.' I felt funny when she said that. I am able to bring myself to the shop with the powered chair.

We need to envision a whole array of strategies which will empower children, which will afford a new basis for relationships between adults and children. Equality could incorporate difference rather than the insistence we all be the same before we can have access to the same rights and considerations. Here are some beginnings:

ON STRIKE

In the autumn of 1985 in Britain students organised a strike to protest against the slave-like conditions of Youth Training Scheme. The response of political leaders was predictably patronizing. Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party offered scornful remarks, to the effect that thousands of students were being led by the nose, by a handful of labour militants. Children have been active in the anti-nuclear and peace movements. The post-bomb generation must live with the the possibility of no future. The National Union of School Students has campaigned against corporal punishment and for student participation in the running of schools. The Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement has developed critiques of adult chauvinism: they recognise that sexual freedom for children and youth is conditional upon other changes in children's status. In Germany, a group called the Indischer Kommunismus run by children and adults extends support to runways and campaigns for a range of children's rights.

As well, there are many small, 'invisible' battles which children fight to preserve their integrity and challenge the limitations/restrictions placed upon their lives.

Although this pamphlet is about childhood in the west, I will be drawing on material from non western countries in order to point to ways in which childhood can be/is different and to undermine ideas about its 'naturalness'.



Labour's executive condemns call for half-day stoppage

Kinnock rebukes 'dafties' behind striking pupils

White Flakes

Will there ever be the final solution? Just thought that maybe the next step out with boots of light, the glowing death, as it is and should be around you as much, they sleep in and make some food. The student has, with us we would protest: we listened to the last evening in public education.

At Henry 8.4g

Hearts they have not
the MacGregor can't you see
The we are not just a piece of
A piece of the world
But you won't give in just one day for
You take our food and take our money
Then you are not our friends and along today
We stand out the good new year
Maybe some day but not today
The new generation is not the old
We are light and dark and hard to the last
Until the picture are stopped being harassed
Jason Stewart 7.1.1986

Why are so many of adults efforts dictated towards control and punishment? Why are children so excluded from public places? Perceived as nuisances and burdens? Why do adults forget so much of the pain and humiliation they endured as children? Why are all the words associated with childhood and youth, negative in meaning, synonyms for incomplete, irrational, insignificant, simpleminded, selfish and so on? The phrase 'to be treated as a child' clearly means to be ignored, humiliated, patronised, to be seen as less of a person.

Children must learn 'restraint'

...and that of the outsider looking in and that of a culture which does not employ coercion and violence towards children.

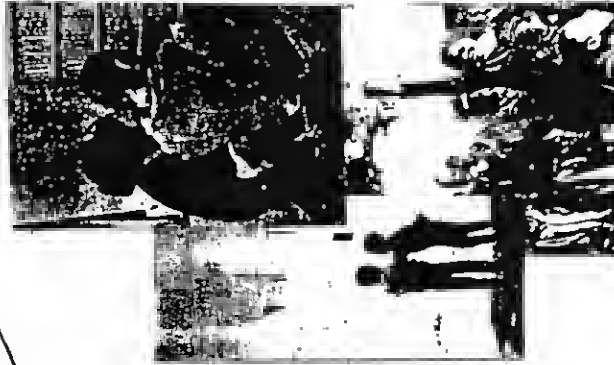
For those who are inside a culture, brought up to accept its ways as natural and proper, it is very difficult to imagine ways in which it might or should be different. When white Europeans came to North America, the indigenous people often thought that white parents did not love or value their children because they hit and bent them. In the near non-bilitation of the Native culture which followed the 'discovery' of the continent, this perspective has been lost, both that of the outsider looking in and that of a culture which does not employ coercion and violence towards children.

Perhaps the most distressing to the tribes were calculated efforts to turn their children from the traditional ways. These efforts were called 'educating the children for citizenship'. The children were forcibly taken to far places where many sickened and died, or committed suicide, or ran away places where their pride was cruelly broken on inflexible rules and alien standards.

F. Turner
on Native Americans

WHAT KIDS SAY ISN'T IMPORTANT

...and that of the outsider looking in and that of a culture which does not employ coercion and violence towards children.



It has become cliché to remark on the level of violence in society, in all areas. During the last year in Britain the media has focused on the deaths of many children ranging in age from a few months to their teens. Some were kidnapped, abused and murdered by strangers, while others and this is by far the greater number, died at the hands of their parents or 'carers' (the NSPCC estimates as many as 3 children die weekly within the family). Several boys have recently committed suicide while confined to borstals practicing the 'short, sharp, shock' treatment. Corporal punishment is still used in many British schools; STOPP, the organisation committed to abolishing it, has recorded many instances of serious assaults on pupils by teachers.

While children's and teenagers' sexuality is closely regulated, often forbidden and repressed, adult men consume vast amounts of child pornography. The profits from this amount to at least 40% of the total for the entire industry. The numbers of children exploited in the production of pornography - films, videos, pictures - is vast, amounting to at least two million a children per year.

While those 21 and under are excluded from wage councils and working anymore are not protected by minimum wage legislation, many employers prefer to hire young people at pay levels on a par with pocket money, rather than salaries. Is it surprising then that more and more young people turn to prostitution? Many of those who have been abused and humiliated at home or 'in care' are to be found surviving this way in the streets.

Under-21s

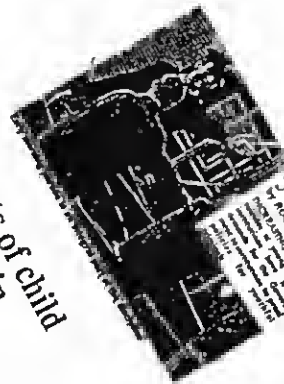
excluded

By Alan McGeachie
The Under-21s are a group of young people who are excluded from the benefits of the minimum wage legislation. It is clear that the system is rigged against them.

Dying for a job

In the last few years 22 young people have been killed and 100 injured, according to the Government's own figures. The Government is to blame for the deaths and injuries. It is clear that the system is rigged against them.

The cruel facts of child abuse in Britain



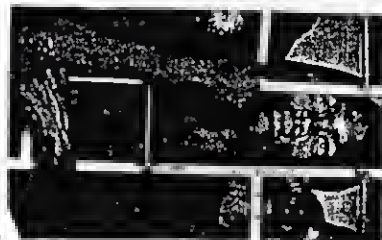
Inquiry call on youth suicides

A group of young people who have been sexually abused by a priest in a Catholic school in London. The children are now being treated by a specialist clinic.

It is still possible to believe that crimes against children are aberrations and name the 'villains': psychotic monsters, 'subnormal' or deprived parents, perverse teachers and youth workers, lazy social workers, unscrupulous profiteers, by marginalizing the evil ones, adults protect themselves from uncomfortable questions and memories, refuse to see the connections between these crimes and the general condition of all children's lives. After all, isn't this a 'child-centred', 'permissive' society? Aren't western children the best fed and housed, with access to the best educational opportunities and health care?

Whether you think these statements are true or not, they do not necessarily mean that our culture likes or respects children, nor that children are content or happy within the environment constructed 'for' them.

SOUTH AFRICA



"We have a funeral every weekend" pupils say on one school for all



Youth organise against KwaDabane

"We are building the future now"

Youths challenge white farms



In South Africa children and youth are at the very heart of the resistance. In 1976 in Soweto, their protest against the teaching of Afrikaans in their schools, erupted into mass protest against apartheid and thousands of children were killed. Today in South Africa they organize boycotts of schools, of white businesses. In Port Alfred they run street committees which replace the racist municipal organisation. When funerals take place it is they who run about to ensure maximum attendance. They display impressive discipline and organizational skills. Many children cannot return home because they are police targets and must effectively live underground.

Children in South Africa are detained, tortured and murdered because they are at the centre of the anti-apartheid movement, not because they are accidental victims of widespread police and army violence.

RESISTANCE



Children, young people, the world over, are involved in collective and individual acts of resistance, and struggle for change. They are not merely victims who suffer passively, but people who rebel, subvert and negotiate a space for themselves within their social positions as children. They are participants in many national liberation struggles, in campaigns concerning their own particular issues and in relationships with individual adults.

Where ever you find movements for national liberation, opposition to colonialism, dictatorship and fascism, you will find children involved, from an early age. In the Spanish Civil War they were active and under Franco's regime the legal age of torture was 14. In Nicaragua, the majority of those killed in the fight to topple the Somoza dictatorship were under 20. In Algeria they were message carriers, decoys and ammunition runners.

In Uganda, Eritrea, Guatemala and countless other places you will find them actively involved. In Chile last year a sit in by 200 school girls (aged upward from 6 years old) to protest against Pinochet, the dictator, resulted in their mass arrest, detainment and sexual harassment.

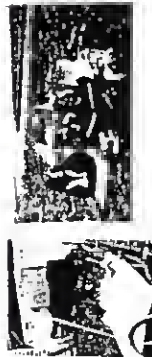
From Malcolm Crowl
Thousands of school-children hurried stones at foot police and to the streets of Santiago, to demand the arrest of a teacher, murder a year ago of a teacher, and two other victims of government death squad.



Children in Santiago protest riot

Any day of the week it is possible to see children being threatened, slapped, insulted, dragged along, pushed, resisting into pushchairs, handled like cute dolls or talked about in their presence as though they didn't exist or didn't have feelings. Often there are signs in shops excluding school children and they are generally barred from places where alcohol is sold. It is an unspoken assumption that children can be ignored and overruled, that they should give way, that adults have priority.

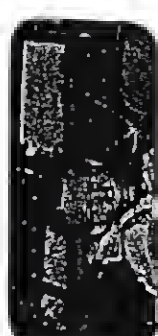
It is useful to compare the interactions between adults, to those between children, and adults. Adults talk with each other, in ways which usually involve respect, equality, being taken seriously. An adult talking with a child is more likely talking at or down to her/him, a patronising or authoritarian tone. Children in the presence of adults can be ignored, told to stop interfering. Children who talk back or just want to engage on an equal level are cheeky, rude, disobedient.



If you believe as I do, that it is the experience of childhood which shapes and limits an individual in decisive ways, then many things are seriously wrong with children's lives today. We all have our first encounter with the world as children yet, for so many adults their childhood experience is vague and piecemeal, summed up by general statements such as a 'happy' or 'deprived' childhood, as though the experience could be categorised and put away. The complexity of feeling and experience is reduced to pat phrases. The first five years is all but lost to memory; a few fragments remain, elusive and shadowy like dreams.



If adults are willing to look at what actually happens to children rather than what is said about them: the expectations treated without respect, the expectations that they be obedient, good, manageable, the degrading stereotypes of children which are reflected in language, images, in toys and entertainment - they will find a childhood which is neither 'carefree' nor 'joyful', but rife with humiliations, lack of recognition and the suppression of creative and sensual drives. If adults were willing to listen to the criticisms, objections and opinions of children, or to their very telling silences, might they not find echoes of their own 'lost years'?



And for children, it is perhaps more difficult to question the edifice of childhood; as children, we are painfully dependent on adults and have integrated the values of being good, obedient and child-like. It is so often the only path to approval and survival.

But resistance does occur in small, invisible ways and often collectively, visibly. Such resistances are named delinquency, hyperactivity, naughtiness, deviancy; children are sometimes subjected to 'treatment' and punishment for these 'disorders'. These resistances need not blind us, if adults are attentive to both the child within them and to the voices of children everywhere.

GIRLS AND BOYS

This pamphlet is addressing the experience of childhood shared by both sexes in western society. All cultures create distinctions between girls and boys, in addition to the purely biological. Thus they have different and shared experiences. The degree and importance of gender-based differences varies enormously amongst cultures and races. In addition to economic systems, family structures and so on. In the west, expectations of what a girl and a boy 'should' be are distinguished according to the prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity.

Femaleism has addressed the problem of sexual stereotyping, particularly how it affects girls, by limiting the scope of their activities and potential and encouraging them to behave in 'feminine' ways which undermine their self confidence. Boys are incited to be competitive, aggressive, and to pursue 'masculine' interests. They should repress feelings of hurt, fear and tenderness and despise behaviour which is identified as 'feminine'.



Yes—very much. Christian to his brother Jack! Helping Memory's friend has given through the gift a little to the good intentions! It's good, isn't it? Christian too. Memory's "very loving" to Christian is given more pleasure—just pure love and other words, which are surely described here in a beautiful tale—

PEARS SOAP



"I guess it took us a few more years before they find out they're the weak on the left."

'Girls are conditioned to fail at maths'

Not only do individual boys and girls suffer from these pressures, but relationships between girls and boys are adversely affected. Sexual stereotyping is also essential to the future positions children will take up as adults in a male dominated society.

Thus an awareness of gender differentiation is crucial and positive, when it has an enabling effect i.e. by encouraging children to challenge and step out of the roles prescribed for them. The danger, which is true of all approaches, if they become pedagogical, is that they will perpetuate adult needs to mould children. Thus, without a general understanding of the common oppression which girls and boys suffer, anti-sexist approaches can be seriously flawed.

REBEL WITH A CAUSE

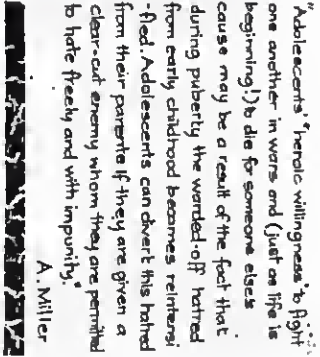
Teenage rebellion is accepted by most people as natural and inevitable. Adolescence is seen as a time when new sexual desires and potency contribute to confusion, intense feelings and distractions. Teenage sexuality is a danger to be contained until teenagers are mature enough to handle it appropriately. The age of consent is 16 for heterosexual relations and 21 for homosexual. But does puberty really explain the violence and self-destructiveness which are associated with adolescence?

The idea that youth must reject the older generation in order to assume its own identity promotes a view of society which is, of necessity, conflictual. Which were different age groups in an antagonistic relationship, is it not possible that the rebellion of youth is a reflection of impeded dependences and constraints, of a legitimate desire to be free from adult control? The contradictions of childhood become more intense as children grow older. The minor privileges and freedoms which they acquire as adolescents do not compensate for the limitations, lack of choice and economic dependency.

If society were to accept that school is not everyone's cup of tea, that family life is often antagonistic, that parents and children often do not get along, then new possibilities could emerge. The fact that school is compulsory means that, outside it, there is no provision for young people. Were they free to channel and utilize their own energies and ideas, they could have positive and creative consequences for everyone.

Technology school plan for young elite

"Put it this way. When you go to secondary school, right? You all start off like cattle . . . put into little groups and all that bullshit on your first day, and there's all this military type bias in school. And they hit the living daylights out of you your first time there."



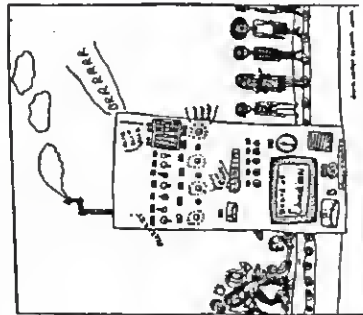
A. Miller

The 'battle of the generations' is not inevitable: it is a reflection of grossly unequal relationships between adults and children, of unnecessary dependencies. If these are perpetuated they will only result in more violence and intergenerational conflict.

It is necessary to look at how social/ economic/ political/ environmental changes can empower children and relieve adults of onerous responsibilities. While this is not on the purpose of this pamphlet, we can look at how children themselves are struggling, contesting and what constitute some of their demands for change.

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

The 'preparation for life' which takes place in schools is, unfortunately, just that. Young people acquire the attributes and skills necessary for the work place; socialization to routine, to physical restraint, to the ability to take orders, the development of 'correct' thinking processes, the suppression of criticism and curiosity. The content of school curriculum is far from neutral or objective and conveys, in general, values which reflect and seek to maintain the status quo.



Boy hit by teacher awarded £700

Caning in schools gets a

year's grace

By David Hencke,
Washington Correspondent

Student councils in secondary schools are in fact supervised by adults, and promote a kind of sham democracy, not unlike that which exists in government. These councils have no significant say in the running of the school, because this would be unacceptable to the adults in charge. Parents are consulted, if minimally, and elect the educational boards, yet those who are most intimately concerned, the students, have no real voice, no power.

Students who don't conform, who rebel in different ways are subject to sanctions and punishments. Extra homework, detentions, suspensions, withdrawal of privileges are commonplace. Corporal punishment is still legal in this country; the sadistic belief that assault results in good behavior, that violence will curb violence, is still prevalent. (Sweden has, since 1979, outlawed all forms of corporal punishment, in homes as well as in schools). In addition, students can be subject to 'therapeutic' treatments from psychologists or psychiatrists. When they are thought to be maladjusted or suffering from some form of psychic disorder,

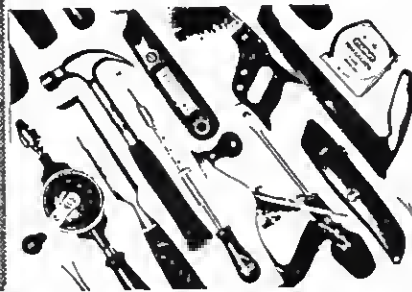
Of course, a sympathetic specialist or teacher can be receptive to children's problems without categorizing them. Never the less, treatment is usually intended to 'help the student adjust to the situation', not to change it. Students who are repeatedly disruptive, violent, 'unmanageable' or truant can be expelled if no other school will accept them and their parents cannot cope, then alternative institutions will absorb them: borstals, children's homes, foster placements, psychiatric units.



➤ WHAT'S IN A THEORY?



When I began writing this pamphlet, I assumed that the ideal starting point for each reader would be their own experience of childhood. This has been my own starting point. I have no desire to impose my own 'theory of childhood' on individual generalisations. When faced with these generalisations, we may reject them out of a legitimate fear of being 'slotted into' a framework that our individual experience will be denied validity. Since this is one of the common experiences of childhood, it would be rather ironic if I were



to construct a single correct version of western childhood.

Each of us have unique experiences distinguished by gender, race, class, ability, culture, family, sexual orientation and so much more. These are the other components of identity and experience which influence each person's childhood. I have titled the following sections the 'cool box', in the hope that it will be both versatile and usable. The tools are the elements which comprise the overall portrait of childhood. These elements can never be pieced together into a coherent and tidy whole because reality is not like that; it varies from moment to moment, from person to person. This is not meant to deny the existence of a system of childhood, which is maintained by legal, social and economic means, as well as by adult chauvinism. It should be possible to seek out common ground, based on a recognition of difference.

» Adult-Child

PAUL'S GOSPEL

It is commonly held that when a person becomes an adult, they must "put away childish things" as did Saint Paul when he became a man. Graduating into adulthood implies, on the one hand, the assumption of a set of characteristics which are not manifested in childhood and, on the other, a rejection of behaviour and desires thought to be childish i.e. undesirable. The ideal adult is responsible, consistent, rational, controlled, mature, aware of others. They are providers, carers, breadwinners. They possess experience and foresight. They are independent. Children, on the other hand, are associated with a very different image: they are selfish, irrational, irresponsible, immature, dependant and needy.

By the time they enter adolescence and youth... Most children have learned the major values that mitigate against aggressivity and violence.... They carry these values with them throughout life, they do not put away childish things.

Turnbull

Rogers's thesaurus cites the following synonyms (words with a similar meaning) for infant, child, youth etc.: ignorant, incomplete, defective, senile, backward, callow, cradulous, unappreciated, simple-minded, unimportant, trifling and naive. The only positive quality listed was trusting i.e. being without suspicion. Skill and intelligence are referred to as exceptional e.g. child prodigy, gifted child. The word youngster had the following associations: 1) young animals e.g. puppy 2) smallness, littleness 3) expressions like urchin, brat, little bugger, spoiled, holy terror 4) sexual reference to girls: nymphet, virgin, place, boyden 5) cutesy words like darline, cherub.



Kohl throws a party to show love of children

Lord Keith of Thrapston, who has been appointed to the post of Lord of the Children, has announced that he will be throwing a party for children in his new role.

Perhaps dictionary references wouldn't be as significant if every-day language didn't reaffirm them: "don't treat me like a child", "now juvenile", "why don't you grow up" etc. To be called childish or adolescent is humiliating and insulting, not only for adults; children also refer to those younger than themselves as "only babies", "just kids". And it is not only verbally that children are portrayed as lacking and insignificant. Visual media and advertising continually project images of children as cute playthings, not to be taken seriously. Political parties, of all colours, exploit the so called naivete of children whom they portray as weak, helpless and in need of their intervention, just look around: t.v. billboards, film, advertising, newspapers. Where can we see children portrayed as strong, resourceful, caring or intelligent?

FORCE FEED

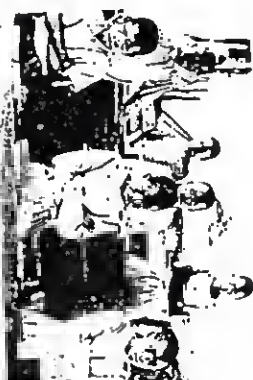
What exactly do we mean by learning? Many people believe that if children were not 'forced' to, they would learn nothing, be lazy and apathetic. This is, in fact, the model of the child or adult whose drive and curiosity have been crushed, rather than stimulated by school and/or their home environment. Anyone who is or spends time with a young child, knows they need no stimulation.

But in school children must follow the adults agenda. They have no choice but to go, since it is compulsory, and practically no say about what, when or how they study. Tests and exams assess how well they can reproduce facts and ideas which may not interest them and with which they may disagree. In the classroom they must obey the teacher and compete with other students. How can this situation foster real debate and learning? No one can be 'taught how to think', or indeed needs to be. They can be given access to information and provided with a supportive atmosphere. They will do the thinking themselves.

TEACH YOURSELF



The numerous experimental schools such as Summerhill (established in England since 1922), of the late 19th and early 20th centuries have consistently discredited the belief that children must be forced to learn. There, children who had not done any formal lessons and decided to pass O or A level requirements were able to achieve this in as little as 2-3 years' time.



Those who had not yet learned to read, but had developed a whole range of skills including the musical, mechanical, artistic and academic, learned to read quickly when this became necessary to gain access to needed information.

What distinguishes many of these alternative schools, is not only the free choice of activity and the absence of competition, but the experience of self-government and responsibility. At Summerhill, the school is run by a weekly General Assembly of students and teachers. Each person has one vote and the chairperson is normally a student they range in age from 5-16. Practical decisions are taken, rules established, disagreements are aired and if necessary, punishments are decided upon.

This is hardly 'running wild'. Rather than waiting for adulthood to be responsible, they are doing it now. It is participation in one's community, in the decisions which affect one's life which fosters respect for collective decisions, for others and for one's own worth, not coercion and submission to other people's rules 'for your own good'.

Violence hits the primary schools

By JUDITH ARDRE, Education Correspondent
The violence in primary schools has become a major concern for many parents and teachers. It is a problem that is becoming more widespread and is a threat to the future of our schools.

Not only does the unconscious obscure the dividing line between the child and the adult selves, but it throws into doubt notions of a fixed identity. The adults who often feel like children or the child, 'mature beyond their years' are not maladjusted: they are simply demonstrating the fluidity of human identity. While it is true that adult persons, in our culture, must take up the social position or role of adult (unless age or illness is used to infantilise them) this is nonetheless a limited truth because individual human subjects never correspond to the category of adult.

Even though the 'child' experience which adults carry within them, is normally censored out, denied, there are points when they are 'allowed' to emerge. Under the influence of alcohol for instance, or in an intimate relationship (where adults can 'baby' one another). Thus we have on the one hand a social ordering, determined by age, which prescribes fixed places to both adults and children and, on the other, a sense of self which elicits and changes depending on the circumstances.



OLD FOR YOUR AGE

While it remains the case that people below a certain age must take up a child's position (i.e. they are legal minors, subject to parental authority, obliged to attend school etc) which is socially inferior, children often



exhibit 'adult' qualities of strength, altruism, independence, and caring. This can be seen in numerous situations - rendered invisible or rejected as 'unsuitable' - as when children care for other children, or provide understanding and tolerance for needy adults, or manage on their own.

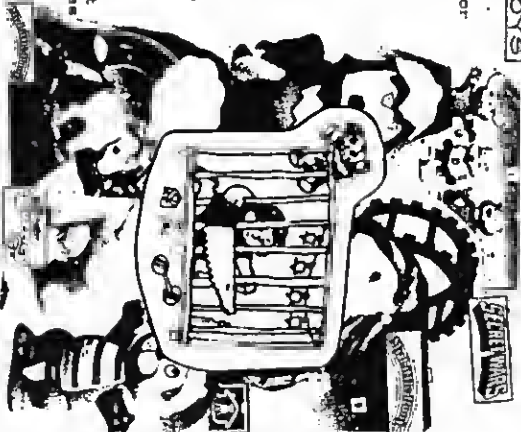
Of course different criteria and expectations come into play to assess child and adult behaviour: the adult who behaves 'childishly' is seen as falling inadequate. 'Childish' serves as an incitement to reassume control, to contain the undesirable emotions.

Children who behave older than their years are seen as overly serious, precocious or 'deprived' of the irresponsibility which is supposed to be the 'right' of childhood. Or they can be accused of cheekiness, arrogance and put in their place. In this way children are pressed into age-appropriate behaviour. Is it not threatening to see children behave in ways which connote powerfulness, so embedded in our culture is the idea of their powerlessness?

TOYS

Toys are often recommended for particular age groups eg. a puzzle for 2-3 year olds. 'Children's' literature is also classified in this way. Imagine buying a book or record 'recommended for those between 30-35 years of age'. That would be absurd. We recognise that individual interests and capacities change with age, but these are only codified where children are concerned.

Toys have a lot to say about children and to children. They are usually of no practical use, or aboddy non-functional imitations of the real thing. They have a potent ideological content: dolls, iron and dish sets for girls, space landers and GI Joes for boys, and racist 'gollywog' images in books. Games are rich in cultural messages, playing with monopoly money teaches the 'value' of money, board and quiz games stimulate the spirit of competition. There are always winners and losers. War games encourage the acceptance of killing and 'necessary' military interventions.



Animals, stuffed or in plastic, are favoured toys for children: not to mention living animals who are given as 'pets'. Children learn from the very beginning, that animals are objects to be used, to satisfy human needs. Zoos are justified by their 'educational' value for children. Seeing uprooted animals in cages is, indeed, highly instructive and reminiscent of the cribs and 'playpens' in which small children are confined, or the fences surrounding school-yards, or the barred windows in borstals and mental institutions. Of course, children often use toys in ways which they were not 'meant to be used'. They subvert the intentions of the makers.

Toys are used once and then abandoned or broken. Children can snuff out a con, as well as anyone. Toys for children, as opposed to toys for just anybody, appear to serve not only ideological, 'instructional' aims, but also to circumscribe the arena of childhood activities. In effect, they are saying to children: concern yourself with the trivial, the futile, the irrelevant and wait till later for the real thing.

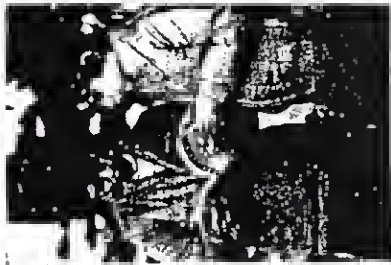
MONEY

Having money is necessary in order to participate in most social activities. Going to restaurants, movies, musical events and many sporting facilities all require cash, not to mention paying for transportation. For young people who can get about by themselves, their options are severely limited by lack of money. Teenagers congregate in shopping malls, on street corners and arcades because these are their options.

Stores which prohibit access to children or limit their numbers at any given time, do so, presumably because children have a reputation as shoplifters. This isn't surprising, given their limited access to money. As well, the desirability of material goods is incessantly promoted by all the medias; acquiring possessions holds out the 'promise' of happiness, status and success. But, the fact is, all age groups shoplift; only children are singled out. If their were a bill of rights in this country, such bigotry could be legally contested, providing of course, that age were included as a category of discrimination.

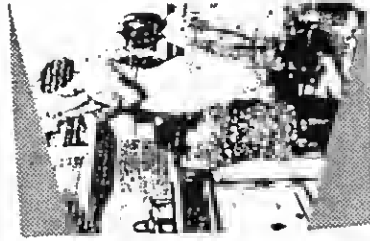
Although it is just such impediments which prevent children from doing a variety of things for themselves, from being more independent, this is not how it is understood. Reality is inverted; it is children who are incapable and unskilled. Then the assumption is realised since, having little or no opportunity to acquire skills and independence, children become incapable and must constantly turn to adults when they want things done, when they need money.

The marvellous potential to absorb information and master skills which young people exhibit is wasted. Adults get irritated, feel trapped and burdened by demands. Children develop ways to get what they want: whining, cajoling, crying, manipulating, etc. This is the inevitable lot of those whose access to the world is mediated by another.



Grocer kills three boys suspected of stealing

It is a horror story that has shocked many people in the town of Groceries. Three boys, aged 12, 13 and 14, were suspected of stealing from a grocery store. The boys were caught by the store manager, who then shot and killed them. The incident has caused a great deal of controversy and has led to calls for a change in the law regarding the death penalty for juveniles.



LETTERS

Dear Sir,
I have just received your letter of the 12th inst. regarding the matter of the children's rights. I am sorry that I cannot provide you with a more definitive answer at this time, but I will do my best to address your concerns.

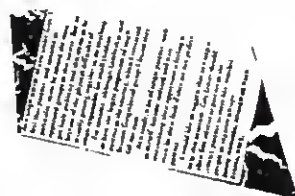


24 Despite the fact that women's role in child care is manifestly unfair, it is not always obvious to have little say in what happens to children (eg, sending them to school, the social pressures to raise obedient children), women constitute the primary social controllers of children during the first 5 years of life. For women, motherhood is a site of power and for many the only site. From a child's perspective, mothers are powerful and can inflict pain, humiliation and denial. They also encourage 'good' behaviour and attempt to shape children in 'desirable' ways.

On the other hand the limitations of this power can be seen, when mothers fly in the face of convention, allow their children 'too much' freedom, or take their side in disputes with authorities. Mothers, particularly those who are working class, black, lesbian or belong to an ethnic minority will often afraid their children will be taken away if their 'child-rearing' practices are unorthodox.

Hurd allows teenage mother to keep baby son with her in Holloway

We can also qualify the extent of mothers' power with an awareness of women's oppression in patriarchal society, but this cannot be used to invalidate children's experience. Women and children are not inseparable; their needs and desires can be divergent, even conflicting. If children were to demand and gain some autonomy and choice, then many of the burdens of motherhood would disappear. However, such demands also challenge the notions of mother- child exclusivity, and women's power over children.



» Authority and Control

PARENT POWER

The word 'authority' may well have its origins in procreation. It derives from the word 'author' which means, amongst other things, the person who 'originates' or gives existence to anything. 'She/he who authorises or facilitates', 'one who begets, a father or ancestor' (Oxford English Dictionary). From this we can see that authority means 'the power to enforce obedience, the right to command, delegated power' - resides in persons who act, initiate, procreate.

So it is that the parent-child relationship is one of the few, if only, areas where authority is still considered to be 'natural' and not contractual. To give life to a new human being also confers considerable power over them. This is confirmed, both legally and socially, as being just and proper. Children are effectively their parent's possessions until they reach majority.

The potential power of parents includes: determining where children live, what they eat, what they wear, their general appearance, choice of school, where children go outside of school. They can punish physically, verbally, by withdrawal of privileges, or confinement in bedrooms. They determine pocket money, usually as a favour, and can control money which children earn or inherit. They can infringe on children's privacy, prohibit friendships and sexual experience.



Brazilians held over baby-sle plot



They can prevent children living elsewhere, and get the police to bring them back, if they run away. They can label children as delinquents or problem children and force psychiatric or therapeutic solutions, or confinement in children's 'homes'. They can foster out when they can't cope and take children back when they feel ready, even after years of absence.

When a runaway child goes to a sympathetic adult, that adult can be charged with kidnapping. Children who run away from home and refuse the punitive alternative of children's homes are forced to live on the streets, where they can be victimised by an array of other exploitative adults. Many of these children end up addicted to drugs or dead, yet it is illegal for them to seek out someone they trust.

Unnecessary force - prosecution P-C grabbed and kicked me, says boy



ALTERNATIVES?

None of which addresses the question of why women are overwhelmingly responsible for children. Why family life is usually organised to produce absent fathers (either at work or simply not there), or why indeed the ideal home life is the nuclear family. Obviously, I do not have the space to address these issues here.

One of the demands of the women's movement has been for men to become more active in childcare in order to equalise the imbalance, and to place men in caring roles. The traditional role for fathers has been that of 'head of household', exercising power over women as well as definition of fathering, which is analogous to mothering, which is change the status of children within families or challenge the relationship between adults and children.



Mother 'took blows aimed at baby'



This is also true of collective facilities such as day care centres and after school programmes. Improving and expanding this public sector, need for paid employment and time to pursue their own interests. While they do facilitate contact between children and provide space outside the home, they do not, in the long term, counteract children's marginalisation, nor their lives.

When I worked in a parent cooperative day care, attempts by workers to integrate children into the decision making were precluded by some parents as productive of chaos, i.e. children later, while doing anything. daycare policies. I asked other workers whether children had a voice in the running of their centres. To some, the question was simply incomprehensible or ludicrous. Some workers referred me to the pedagogical guidelines of the centre. This was the only framework in which they could understand a question about children's role.

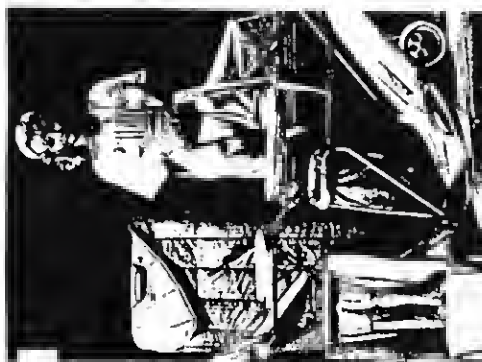
Women are without question the primary carers of children in our society. They bear the brunt of this responsibility and yet the resources and assistance available to them are pitiful. Mothering is a social concept; what is expected of 'good' mothers varies historically, culturally and between social classes. Since world war 2 there has been a proliferation of books on child development, psychology and care which bite the mother's heels as crucially important. The majority of this literature has been written by male 'experts', who describe children and identify their 'needs', along with the role of mothers. Mothers are expected to respond to their child's every need be it emotional, physical or intellectual.

Clearly, the greater children's autonomy, the less work for mothers. This can be witnessed where children have relationships with other adults, who are also 'responsible' for them, or where children have access to safe outdoor spaces. In societies where children work and care for younger children, they quickly become co-workers of mothers and fathers. It is only recently, in the west, that mothering has been conceived as full time job.



Endless mothering

THOMAS
- no info re
- info re
- info re



Previously, other social tasks for women, such as farming, paid employment, cooking and sewing, to name a few occupied the bulk of her time. Children participated at their own level or later were occupied at some employment. None of which he meant to recommend a life of perpetual work, but to point out how varied can be the content of mothering.

STATE INTERVENTION

Parental authority is also transferable to guardians, teachers, and in the case of state intervention, to the courts and their agents, eg. social workers. Although it is in essence true that the welfare state weakens parental authority, it can also be seen as an extension of it. The state intervenes when parental authority is seen to break down or be inadequate, or when parental care is thought to be lacking. Thus welfare institutions provide continuity and validation for the idea of authority. Since care is perceived as knowing what is best for children, or acting in their best interests, it is not incompatible with authority.

intervention is normally more systematic and total. The levels of surveillance, in children's homes far exceed those possible within the family. Children who are placed in homes because of parental violence or neglect, are in effect punished for their own victimization. Victims of sexual abuse by fathers, usually girls, are regularly removed from their homes and placed in institutions.

**ADOPTIVE PARENT WANTED
FOR JOHN**

[illegible]

Putting young offenders

(Fremont) to end short, sharp shock regimes

Parental discipline is the gateway to knowledge." —Spero T. Aaron

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is the flip side of authority, its complement. Obedience is what is expected from children. In no other later-human relationship is this assumption so uncontested. The 'good' child means the compliant and obliging one. Thus, virtue for children is linked to obedience rather than active qualities such as initiative or compassion.

This early training continues to be of relevance in later years, and may explain why adults themselves are obedient in the face of a multitude of authority figures. Obediencs is not an act to be shrugged off, but a state of mind. It serves to invalidate individual desires and opinions, and to generate guilt. As well it arouses the fear that we might lose the love and approval of those we love and on whom we depend. As children we

internalise the values of adult figures and these remain with us. When adults speak of the "need for discipline" their voices often seem to be coming from somewhere else. When asked why discipline is so necessary they give cliché responses like "Children would run wild" or "they must respect their elders".

"If an adult has not developed a mind of his own, then he will find himself at the mercy of the authorities for better or worse, just as an infant finds itself at the mercy of its parents. Saying no to those more powerful will always seem too threatening to him."

A. Miller

The reason for this are many, but central to this process, was a concept of the child which had been developing amongst the middle and upper classes for some time. Children were innocent, vulnerable and easily

corrupted, so they needed to be sheltered from the evil world until they were old enough to resist its temptations. They were the "little angels in the house", a diversion for world weary fathers, and certainly had nothing to do with the dirty business of earning money.

This stereotypical Victorian view of children's 'nature' contrasted absurdly with the reality of working class children's experience: in factories, on the streets, in agricultural work, in the pornography and prostitution industries.

Nevertheless this view provided a rational for the child protection movement and outlined the proper sphere of childhood. Their was no question of improving working conditions and wages for children. Henceforth, men came to be seen as the principal breadwinners. Children belonged outside the work world: in the home, with women or at school in permanent tutelage.



PROTECTION VERSUS SELF RELIANCE

Protection is never neutral, disinterested or without negative consequences. Sheltering children from the work world has made them totally financially dependent on parents. The daily regime in school reproduces factory discipline. Their bodies, their time and their intellects are monitored by bells, confinement to desks, by exams, grades and punishments, and by teacher surveillance.

Women jeer Leoni

Leoni, a young girl, is being jeered by a group of women. The scene is set outdoors, with a building in the background. The women are dressed in traditional attire, and Leoni is looking down, appearing distressed.

Angels have their problems

Angels, like all children, have their problems. The illustration shows a group of children, some of whom are looking at the camera with expressions of concern or sadness.

Other institutions have arisen to contain those who do not adapt in home or school. With each new outburst of rebellion, there is a cry for more discipline, more specialise. With each new act of brutality against children, which comes to light in the press, there is a cry for more

protection, more intervention. It is not time, while keeping in mind the very real vulnerability of children in the current system, to call into question the idea of protection? To ask what has it achieved?

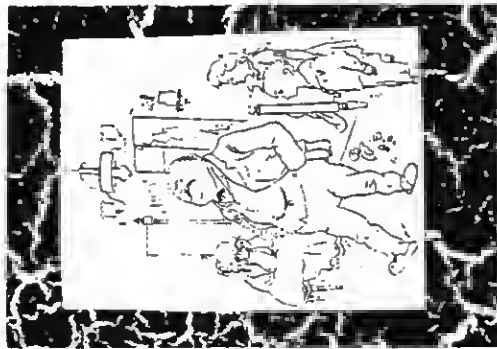
If by protecting children we are making them more dependent and vulnerable to exploitation, then this is not only counter-productive, but hypocritical. When adults think of protecting children, it is always against the danger "out there", against other adults since they themselves know "what is best". We seem incapable of realizing that a protector can also be an abuser, a person who does not respect a child's integrity or wishes - in short, any adult, be they parent, teacher, stranger or youth worker.

Real protection is self protection. Adults need to work with children to confront dangers and problems, to examine what resources and rights children need in order to be stronger and more independent. And, adults need to look at how they benefit from children's dependency.

Old 'need protection' by law like young'

It would seem that too much is expected from the nuclear family: small and isolated, it is anathema, expected to provide for the emotional and sexual needs of its members as well as the necessities of food, shelter etc. Within the family adults can and do control children via a range of emotional, physical, economic and sexual coercions. The intervention of state protectors in extreme cases and the very category of abuse itself as exceptional or distinct, camouflages the abusive nature of adult power.

In other areas of life this power can be named: tyrannical, arbitrary, manipulative. Yet we often hear children described as tyrants and manipulators. Is it really possible to believe that a child dependent in so many ways on adults can in fact tyrannise them? Children appear to get what they want by manipulating their subordinate status eg by tantrums and rebellion. But they usually pay for these 'victories' by feeling guilty or suffering adult resentment.



Don't Interrupt!

Turn the television down!
Close the door!
Don't make a sound!
Don't touch anything!
Don't go anywhere!
Don't talk to anyone!
Don't look at anyone!
Don't think about anything!
Don't do anything!
Don't be late!
Don't be noisy!
Don't be messy!
Don't be lazy!
Don't be selfish!
Don't be greedy!
Don't be angry!
Don't be sad!
Don't be afraid!
Don't be nervous!
Don't be shy!
Don't be clumsy!
Don't be clumsy!

THE PRICE OF RESPECT

To whom can children speak of their pain and suffering, when everything legitimates adult authority, and they fear the loss of adult love and approval? Children not only tolerate an enormous amount from adults, but often assume the blame for their own victimisation. In such a state of isolation they become cut off from feelings of rage, hurt and humiliation. Later as adults they may remember the mistreatment, but are incapable of invoking the feelings.

Thus many adults can laughingly recall incidents which were anything but funny. This doesn't mean that the hurt feelings have vanished; on the contrary, they surface in the need to control and punish children, in a vain attempt to compensate. Children must respect adults, regardless, because adults were not respected as children.

DEPENDENCY

MINORITY STATUS

All people under 18 are legal minors. The term itself is an apt description of children's status, meaning "the lesser of two things, species etc.": comparatively small or unimportant; not to be reckoned amongst the greater or principal individuals of the kind." Being a minor is being less of a person, since you are deprived of a variety of rights and freedoms which are available to major persons.

You cannot live where you want or without parent/guardian; you cannot enter into legal contracts or vote. You cannot hold public office or be protected by minimum wage laws. Under sixteen you cannot work full time, drive or drink, marry, leave school, attend certain films or engage in heterosexual relations. The age of consent for homosexuality is 21. Lesbianism is not subject to legislation under British law.

A minor can be legally assaulted by parents, guardians and teachers. The power of parents can extend, as previously mentioned into a variety of non legal areas like appearance, friendships, privacy, daily decision making and so on. The sum total of these sanctions result in incredibly selling and artificial limitations for minors, particularly teenagers, and heavy responsibilities for adults.

In theory minors are 'not responsible', although they can be held criminally responsible at 10, and should they fall foul of adults, they can be subjected to long spells of incarceration in borstales, homes and psychiatric units. Becoming pregnant, being an incest victim or battered child, skipping school, running away, lesbianism/homosexuality are some of the many reasons why minors are institutionalised. These are heavy prices to pay for one's 'lack of responsibility'.

Shortly after presentation to the camp the child is given a first name decided on by family and friends together from the moment of naming onward, the child is treated as a full person with individual rights.

C. Turnbull on the Mbuti People

Over-16s 'need consent law change'

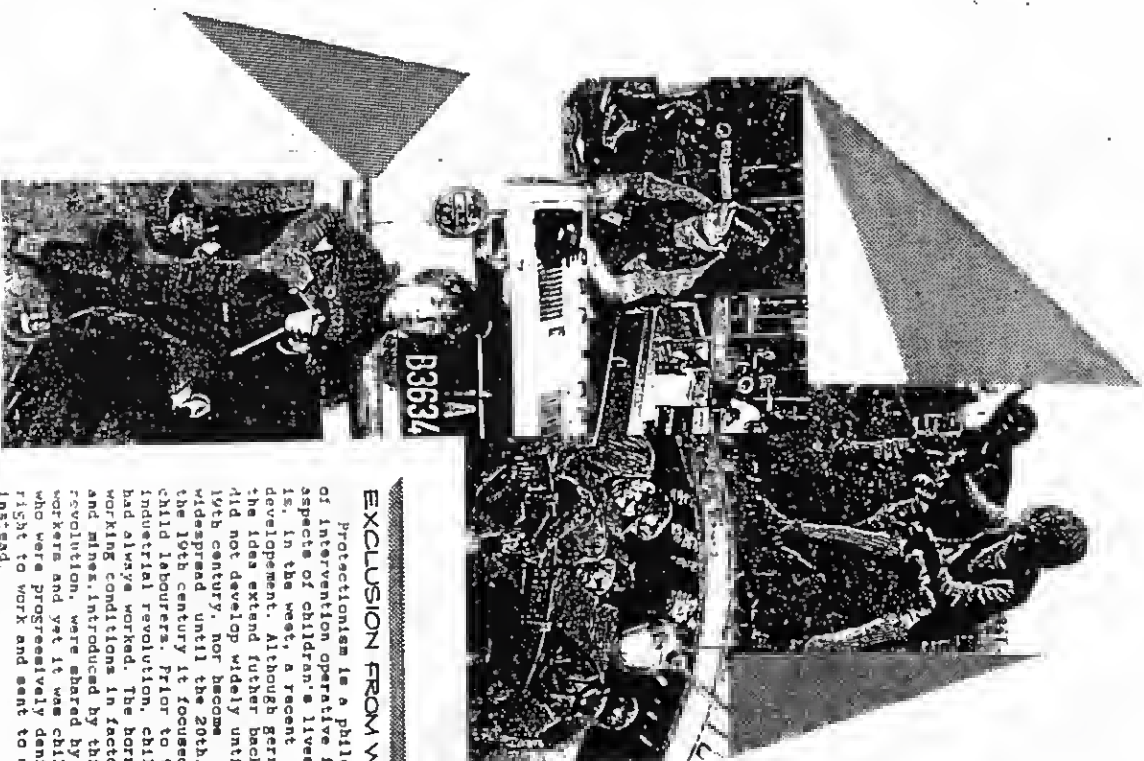
Pay protection to go for

500,000 young workers

ADULTS AS PROTECTORS

The idea that adults "know what is best" for young people and that young people must be protected is neither universal, nor historically consistent. In many third world countries, where children's labour is essential to family survival, no one doubts their ability to perform a variety of tasks and to be responsible. In Naples, you can see children as young as 6 working competently as painters, mechanics, etc. and working around on mopeds.

Is it their independence and self-reliance which is the 'problem' or their lack of resources and opportunities due to poverty race or gender? It is common for adults to equate children's independence with deprivation. Replacing autonomy, no matter how relative, with dependency, is not progressive, but it does satisfy adult needs to see children as helpless and needy. Is there an adult reading this who would deny that they feel gratified every time a child turns to them for help or protection, or asks for money, or permission to do something?



EXCLUSION FROM WORK

Protectionism is a philosophy of intervention operative in most aspects of children's lives. It is, in the west, a recent development. Although germs of the idea extend further back, it did not develop widely until the 19th century, nor became widespread until the 20th. In the 19th century it focused on child labourers. Prior to the industrial revolution, children had always worked. The horrific working conditions in factories and mines, introduced by this revolution, were shared by all workers and yet it was children who were progressively denied the right to work and sent to school instead.